

Sisters of the Soil... Surviving Collective, Cultural Traumatization: Intertextualities between Hagar, the Ethiopian Virgin Girls in the Book of Esther, and Mother Africa.

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Abstract:

Assessing ancient Israel and Africa as contexts, this paper evaluates the intersections between colonialism, patriarchy, and the sexual exploitation of Mother Africa and Africana girls. Specifically, the stories of Hagar, in the book of Genesis, and the virgin girls, in the book of Esther, are explored. I argue that the Africana¹ girls represented in both texts are exploited by multiple sets of patriarchs and empires, who sexually objectify and commodify them. The girls' anatomical/material bodies are sexually invaded, silenced, displaced and ultimately erased. Similarly, Mother Africa's geopolitical and socio-cultural body is physically and sexually exploited and regulated by colonial forces. Often, the sexual exploitation of Africana girls and women are overshadowed and marginalized in the reception histories of Genesis and Esther through narrative focus on Israel/the Jews. Moreover, many interpreters engage solely in gender analysis, ignoring the intersectional oppression of Africana females. These experiences of Africana females described in the biblical texts reflect the lives and experiences of colonized, diasporized, Africana women in contemporary contexts and Mother Africa herself, who continues to be raped and pillaged by colonial forces. As such, both Africa and Africana girls and women are positioned socio-historically as sex objects. This sexual objectification and exploitation constitutes collective, cultural trauma.

Introduction

Strong parallels exist between Africana girls/women and mother earth. Many Africana females give life, nurture, heal, become saviors of societies and curators of culture yet are treated similar to the way humanity in general, but colonizers specifically, treat Mother Africa. In this paper, I will engage in an intertextual reading of the narratives of Hagar and the virgin girls from the book of Esther applying a polyvocal intersectional lens in order to illuminate instances of labor and sexual trafficking of Africans girls and women. Specifically, I critique single axis gender analysis of their oppression in favor of a polyvocal intersectional approach as polyvocality and intersectionality aids our ability to see that both Hagar and the Africana girls in the book of Esther are oppressed not solely on the basis of gender but at the convergence of their gender, ethnic, and class identities. As a dialogical cultural study, this essay sheds light on ancient community's struggle to deal with sexual violence and exploitation. At the same time, it sensitizes contemporary audiences to the wider social and global problem of sexual trafficking. By doing so, I am able to illuminate the complexities of diasporic identity marked by contestation and traumatization in colonial contexts. More specifically, I shed light on how patriarchs and colonizers create and utilize trade and trafficking routes to create exploitative

¹ To clarify my use of the term Africana in this essay, Africana females constitute the collective of girls and women that are both located on the continent of Africa and those that descend from Africa and either voluntarily migrated or were displaced from the continent forcibly, through the transatlantic slave trade.

systems and institutions of sexual violence that impacts and fragments Africana girls and women as well as Mother Africa.

As an Africana Biblical scholar, I situate my interpretations of Genesis 16 and Esther 1-2 in the context of the transatlantic slave trade in order to better understand the interconnecting relationship between colonialism, diasporization, and sexual trafficking and their deleterious impact upon Africana girls and women's identities. As a biblical scholar, my work is inextricably tied to the world and phenomenon happening in it. Therefore, I am mindful of the relationship between myself, my own context, the text, and its context. My aim in this essay is to produce knowledge that bears witness to African females' historical collective traumatization, its bearing on our identities, and our resilience.

Attention to intersectionality and polyvocality deepens, expands, and problematizes single axis gender analysis. Kimberlè Crenshaw's multi-axis, intersectional framework privileges the complex lives and experiences of Africana girls and women whom she identifies as "multiply-burdened" (Crenshaw 1989, p. 140). In addition, Polyvocality is a literary form that is characterized by multiple and varied voices and/or perspectives,² deepens, expands and problematizes this single axis gender analysis. Polyvocality encourages diverse readings and interpretations of texts rather than a preferred dominant interpretation. It invites reflection on the multiple spaces summoned and controlled in both biblical narratives and the multiple layers of subjugated identity within the Africana female collective. Polyvocality not only provides a glimpse into Africana females' lives and experiences in the narrative world but, it affords me, an Africana researcher and writer, the opportunity and space for reflection as an insider. I am allowed the opportunity to express, from experience, how Africana girls and women understand ourselves; how sexual exploitation, displacement, colonial domination and other traumatic events impact our identities, histories, and memories, and relationships. This methodological move counters the theoretical invisibility and erasure of Africana girls and women caused by single axis analysis affording Africana female bodies visibility in an effort to break cycles of and silences around sexual exploitation.

Placing Africana girls and women's lives and experiences as the starting point of theoretical frameworks and analysis illuminate the intersections of race, class, and gender oppressions which reflect the multiple-disadvantages that Africana girls and women resiliently endure (Crenshaw, 145). By reading the stories of Hagar and the nameless virgin girls taken from Ethiopia and other African countries intertextually and in conversation with the experiences of Mother Africa and exploited Africana females in contemporary contexts, this paper illuminates how ethnicity, gender, and class intersects with invisibility, both in biblical studies and in contemporary accounts of Africana history and memory.

Genesis presents a story that centers on the experiences of an enslaved African girl named Hagar. The Esther text recounts the experiences of a diverse set of girls from varied

² Daniel, Chandler and Rod Munday. "Polyvocality," In *A Dictionary of Media and Communication: Oxford University Press*, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.drew.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-2079>.

ethnic backgrounds and different geographical locations including several African countries. A framework of intersectionality, thus sheds light on how Africana girls and women are continually rendered invisible in the reception histories of Genesis and Esther. Further, Africana girls and women in contemporary contexts are disproportionately victims of violence because of continuing practices of patriarchy,³ colonialism, discrimination, poverty, weakened family structures, unjust and prejudicial treatment of persons based on ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, age and other markers of identity. By failing to address the sexual traumatization of African girls in the books of Genesis and Esther, interpreters inadvertently uphold ideologies that Africana girls and women cannot be violated. This ideology is rooted in notions that persons of African descent are not fully human, the crime of the rape of Africana girls and women is non-existent, and that we do not have to be protected from oppression. I will now outline the sexual exploitation experienced by Hagar and the virgin girls. Then, I will delineate the exploitation of Mother African and make connections between the two stories.

Hagar: A Sister of the Soil

The subjugation and subordination of females is an inherent feature of both patriarchal and colonial cultures. This ideology and practice is clearly evident in the narrative of Hagar. When Hagar is introduced by name in Genesis 16, we learn that she is an Egyptian slave-girl. She is a female slave, thus the property of both Abram and Sarai. Sarai commands Abram to “go into” Hagar, so that she may have children through Hagar. Forcing any teenaged slave to become a wife for the purpose of having a child is a violent form of sexual oppression, yet in order to gain a fuller glimpse of the intersectional oppressions that Hagar endures, it is important to note her inclusion as a non-person earlier in the text. Hagar is first introduced in the story world as a nameless, faceless slave before she is introduced by name in Genesis 16 (NRSV).

In Genesis 12, the couple flees Canaan during a famine and travels to Egypt. There, because of Sarai’s beauty, Abram is afraid that she will be taken from him and he will be killed. Thus, Abram instructs Sarai to present herself as his sister and not his wife. He exploits Sarai’s beauty, subjecting her to potential sexual exploitation by the Pharaoh, while he receives material surplus that significantly improves his socio-economic status: sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels (12:16). Undoubtedly, Hagar is one of the female slaves that Abram receives. In other words, Abram acquires his wealth including Hagar, the Egyptian female slave, by exercising male privilege over Sarai in order to attain a status that he would not possess without her objectification.

In Genesis 16, Sarai forces Hagar, her slave, to have sex with Abram and have a child on her behalf. Sarai appropriates Hagar’s body because of her reproductive incapacity. Abram fails

³ Patriarchy means “rule of the father” and reflects the historical tradition of fathers ruling in all sectors of society encompassing the personal, political, and in both private and public spheres. Patriarchy is thus an impression of sexual differentiation that privileges males over females. See Gabriele Griffin, “Patriarchy,” In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*: Oxford University Press, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.drew.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780191834837.001.0001/acref-9780191834837-e-287>.

to question Sarai or offer any rebuttal; he simply complies. Hagar is, thus, multiply oppressed on the basis of gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and reproductive ability. She is the ethnic Other whom the patriarch Abram sexually exploits. Hagar is therefore a double victim of sexist oppression. First, she is a victim of objectification and interpersonal sexism in the same way that Sarai is victimized. However, more than rendered the object of the male's gaze, Sarai offers Hagar to Abram, nonconsensually, as a sexual object. Hagar therefore becomes the object onto which Sarai's internalizes both the stigmatization of her infertility caused by the deity and Abram's sexist behavior of passing her off as his sister in order to gain wealth. Consequently, Sarai asserts domination, instead of vulnerability, through her control of Hagar's reproductivity. Sari's forced Hagar to have a child without respecting her agency, or allowing Hagar a choice. Sarai could have used her own suffering to empathize with Hagar's inferior status and powerlessness. Instead, she became a co-conspirator with Abram and the deity, exercising sexual exploitation as a means to control, immobilize, and dominate Hagar, the defenseless Egyptian slave girl.

Judith McKinlay notes that an itinerary is reversed as Hagar comes up from Egypt to "serve" Sarah who in Genesis 12, went down to "serve" the Pharaoh in Egypt, "serve" having a sexual undertone (2005, 160). This observation underscores both females' exploitation by an individual with higher status and greater power for some type of sexual "service". However, the "service" does not benefit the women themselves, only the one who appropriates each woman. For example, Abram's appropriation of Sarai's body benefits him economically in a similar way that Sarai's appropriation of Hagar's body benefits her economically. Moreover, attention to this itinerancy illuminate movement across national borders, which is a feature of sexual trafficking.

In addition, McKinlay's attention to Hagar's Egyptian nationality suggests that Hagar experiences not only sexist oppression but colonial oppression as well. McKinlay attends to how foreigners enter her homeland, extract and exploit her physically and sexually. Collaboratively, Abram and the deity establish a colonizing context that thrives off of dislocating, disenfranchising, dispossessing, and sexually exploiting an African girl in order to "build a nation".

Franz Fanon's (1965) outline of a four-phase colonial model for understanding oppression, is consistent with McKinlay's view. What Abram does to Sarai, and her internalization of that oppression which underlies what Sarai does to Hagar, fit Fanon's model. The first phase is the forced entry of a foreign group into a territory to exploit its natural resources, including its inhabitants. The second phase entails the imposition of the colonizers culture and the disintegration and recreation of the indigenous culture as defined by the colonizer. In the third phase, the colonized is portrayed as wild, or uncivilized which conveys that domination and oppression are necessary. Finally, during the fourth phase, a society is established where the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain the colonizer while simultaneously subjugating the colonized. In this way, I am reading Abram and Sarai as colonizers who enter Egypt, and exploit, transport, and subjugate its inhabitant, Hagar and later, her offspring.

The first phase of Fanon's model is demonstrated in Abram's journey to Egypt. Abram leaves the land of Canaan because there is a severe famine (Genesis 12:10). He goes at the

command of the Lord looking to exploit resources because there are none in his country. The second phase materializes in this narrative as Abram and Sarai take Hagar and the other slaves out of Egypt to the land of Canaan. Although Hagar is of low social status as determined by her representation as a slave, her ethnic, cultural, and religious identity is rooted in the Egyptian society. Thus, not only do Abram and Sarai uproot her from her indigenous culture, but they force her to appropriate their culture and identity in an alien land especially by forcing her to have Abrams' child. In this way, Sarai pimps out Hagar to Abram the same way Abram pimped out Sarai. Further, that Hagar has a slave status conveys that her domination and oppression are necessary.

Stage four of Fanon's model is realized through the Angel of the Lord. The Angel participates in the oppressive sexism and is responsible for establishing a society where the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain the colonizer while simultaneously subjugating the colonized. In the narrative, after experiencing forceful impregnation, Hagar runs away from Sarai. Then the Angel of the Lord finds Hagar in the wilderness by a spring of water (16:6-7). This spring is likely the only resource Hagar had for herself and her unborn child. This scene illumines the stark difference of status and accessibility to resources between Hagar, and Sarai and Abram, especially when juxtaposed to the scenes where Abram obtains generous surplus coming out of Egypt. Yet, instead of providing material resources and/or emotional support for Hagar, the angel of the Lord instructs her to go back and submit to her oppressor/colonizer, Sarai (16:9).

The third phase of Fanon's colonial model is also seen in the wilderness encounter between Hagar and the Angel of the Lord. The Angel gives Hagar a promise similar to the one made to Abram, to multiply her offspring so much that they cannot be counted. Although she is not explicitly referred to as wild or uncivilized, the Angel of the Lord renders a very bleak announcement, that her son will be "a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." (16:12). Already overwhelmed by her experience of oppression and lack of necessary resources, how is this announcement supposed to function? Is it a blessing or a curse from this representative of the deity? I posit that this message from the Angel foretelling Hagar's unborn son's perpetual state of inferiority and oppression, when contrasted to the promise given to Abram, serves to establish a society where the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain Abram's family unit including Sarai and her forthcoming son Isaac, while subjugating Hagar and her forthcoming son Ishmael.

Later in the narrative, 21: 8-20, Sarah abuses Hagar again after. After seeing Hagar's son playing with her son, Sarah commands Abraham to cast both Hagar and Ishmael out because she fears that Ishmael will inherit along with her son Isaac. In this episode, Abraham is distressed unlike in the earlier episode where Sarah sexually exploits and oppresses Hagar. However, this time God instructs Abraham to do whatever Sarah tells him to do because it's through Isaac that offspring will be named after him (21:13). Abraham, who has acquired abundant material resources, including Hagar, takes only bread and a skin of water, to give to Hagar, and sends her and his son away. Hagar and Ishmael wanders in the wilderness and surprisingly, though not without struggle, they survive. Hagar is erased from the rest of the narrative.

The Virgin Girls in the Book of Esther: Sisters of the Soil

Trade and in the case of the book of Esther, sex trafficking routes are also how Esther and the virgin girls enter the story world as they are transported from their native homes and provinces to the king's palace for the purpose of sex. This trafficking route is established in the first two chapters. The king's officials indicate that virgin girls will be gathered by appointed commissioners in all the provinces of Ahasuerus' kingdom and brought to his palace in Susa (2:2b-4a). The scope of his kingdom is revealed in 1:1. He rules 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. Recognized as organized crime, sexual trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of people by coercive and abusive means for the purpose of sexual exploitation. More specifically, child sexual trafficking is where profitable sex acts are induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age⁴ and is evidenced in the book of Esther where the king's servants suggest:

Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. And let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; let their cosmetic treatments be given them. And let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti" 2:2b-2:4a.

The United Nations Convention on Transnational Crime article 3a further delineates that human trafficking is:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at minimum, the exploitation of prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.⁵

According to these definitions, there are three elements to trafficking: the process, the way/means, and the goal, all of these components are visible within the king servants' speech (2:2-4). By imperial and patriarchal decree, virgin girls are to be sought out and transported to the king's palace. This represents the process of trafficking. Once the process is approved, the tactics begin: young girls are to be forcibly gathered (the means) and brought to the king (strategy). The goal is sexual exploitation, noted by the euphemism, "pleases" the king (2:4). The

⁴ Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386, § 102(a), 114 Stat. 1464, 1466.

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime" in *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto* (New York, 2004), 42. Accessed at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica/organised-crime/UNITED_NATIONS_CONVENTION_AGAINST_TRANSNATIONAL_ORGANIZED_CRIME_AND_THE_PROTOCOLS_THERETO.pdf

virgin girls are violently separated from their natal homes, further subjected to a beautification process which includes pampering and perfume for a year (2:12), then are shifted from one harem, to the king's bedroom, to another harem as night after night the king sexually exploited each girl (2:14). After Esther is chosen to replace Vashti as queen, the girls remain alienated, silenced, and are rendered invisible in the king's palace and narratively, indefinitely. These processes reflect a system of sexual trafficking that includes partnerships and organized crime; the recruitment and abduction of victims; transit, control, retention of victims; and wide-scale sexual abuse. Moreover, law-making becomes a trope that drives the violent plot of the narrative commencing with the sexual exploitation of females in the first two chapters and culminating with the brutally violent murders throughout the rest of the text.

In sex trafficking, there are generally four parties involved in a transaction although not all four are necessary for the facilitation of abuse: the perpetrator, the vendor, the facilitator, and the victim(s). The perpetrator sexually exploits the victim(s). Perpetrators can be sole individuals or work in networks. The vendor(s) extend the services/bodies/capital that make sexual trafficking possible, the facilitator(s) expedites the victimization process. The victim(s) are the object of sexual exploitation (Beyer 2000, 308). I interpret the king as the perpetrator, the king's servants as the vendors, the king's officers within each province as the facilitators, and the virgin girls as the victims. In the book of Esther, the king, his servants, and officials work as a network; all willing and contribute to the sexual trafficking of the virgin girls. The interconnectedness of this structure implies that sexual trafficking—as a form of extraction and abuse— emerges as an urgent category of study in postcolonial and empire studies.

Fanon's four-phase colonial model is applicable in the book of Esther as well. The first phase occurs of forced entry into the foreign group's territory and exploitation of its natural resources occurs when the king's commissioners enter his provinces and gather the virgin girls. The second phase wherein there is an imposition of the colonizer's cultural and the disintegration and recreation of the indigenous culture occurs during the beautification process. Here, the Persian colonizers impose their culture and beauty standards on the virgin girls, fashioning the girls into passive Persian females fit to marry the king. Vashti, who represents the female collective in chapter one, who has the potential to inspire all other females according to Memucan (1:17-18), is presented as untamed and resistant. Her resistance to the king/empire instigates the domination, oppression and sexual exploitation of the virgin girls in chapter two. Moreover, all throughout the book of Esther, a society is established wherein the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain the colonizer (male colonizers, specifically) while simultaneously subjugating the colonized, (colonized ethnic females in particular).

What is often overlooked in traditional interpretations of chapter two but that stands out with the foregrounding of polyvocal Africana hermeneutics is that many of the virgin girls come from geographical locales that are predominantly inhabited by black and brown girls today: Africa and India. Analogously, black and brown females are disproportionately vulnerable to and targeted by sexual traffickers in contemporary contexts. Far too many treatments of the book of Esther focus primarily on the Jewish girl Hadassah and on the Jews' plight, even though the narrative reflects the experiences of multiple cultural and ethnic groups. In as much as the story is about its main character, Hadassah, it likewise reflects Africana girls' experiences as there is

an explicit reference to Ethiopia and an implicit reference to girls being gathered and transported from other African provinces that were subjected to Persian domination.

Africana Girls and Women in Biblical Texts Conclusions:

Sexualized language and imagery in both narratives are connected to social and geographical settings and movement between these settings. I have illustrated that in both narratives, colonizers and patriarchs exercise agency and power in order to forcibly transport Africana bodies across national boundaries for the purpose of sex. The language and imagery embedded within these texts suggest that females in African countries are sexually exploitable; it justifies the transportation of female Africana bodies to the palaces, harems, bedrooms, homes, and empires of patriarchal and colonizing subjects. As such, Africana bodies become highly sexualized ethnic bodies under the tutelage of patriarchy-empire. In addition, Africana female characters are introduced with minimal details about their social locations. This often inhibit our ability to interpret that their abuse is a result of their intersectional identities. Minimal details about their identities and euphemisms both contribute to many readers glossing over the sexual trafficking presented within these texts or missing it altogether. Moreover, once raped and exploited in the narrative, African girls and women are narratively silenced and erased. Sexual violence therefore begins and ends with narrative and vocal silencing and suppression. A polyvocal and intersectional Africana hermeneutic, is therefore, a means of resisting both narrative silencing and erasure and sexual exploitation of Africana girls and women.

Mother Africa: She Who Connects the Sisters of the Soil

Sexualized violence is also employed to terrorize and exploit Africa. Although she is the mother of humanity, the continent of Africa has long been the object of pillage, exploitation, and terror by European colonizers from the 16th -19th centuries. Globalization, however, has led to increased interest in and the exploitation of Africa's people and the continent's natural resources including energy, minerals, and animals. European colonization and exploitation of Africa's resources has resulted in physical, social, economic, sexual, environmental consequences.⁶ Their exploitative practices have spiritual and theological implications as well since their colonial exploitation was framed as Christian missions work. Katie G. Cannon expounds on the relationship between Christian missions and the transatlantic slave trade. She writes,

...the missiologic of imminent parousia can be defined as the link created between biblical urgency and cultural reasoning that legitimates the mission strategies of Christian imperialists. Strictly speaking, European expansionists who perpetrated human

⁶ For example, see Nathan Nunn, "Historical Legacies: A Model Linking Africa's Past to Its Current Underdevelopment," in *Journal of Development Economics* 83, no. 1 (2007): 157-175; Denise Cuthbert, "Beg, Borrow or Steal: The Politics of Cultural Appropriation," in *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 1, no. 2 (1998): 257-262; Ehiedu E. G. Iweriebor, "The Colonization of Africa," *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*, accessed online at: <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-colonization-of-africa.html>.

trafficking synchronized the Christian understanding of parousia—the quick approaching, expected hope of the return of Jesus Christ as judge to terminate this world order, with the early church’s confession of a universal christophany, commonly referred to as the “great commission” based on Matthew 28:18-20. Thus, for three centuries, the missiologic of imminent parousia served as the standard European false justification with viscous consequences for more than 12 million Africans who embarked on hellish voyages to the Americas in wretched, suffocating, demeaning conditions, shackled and chained as marketable commodities. (Cannon 2008, 128-9).

Both the stealing of material resources by colonial forces and the enslavement of African people in the name of Christian missions destabilized and depleted economic stability across the continent. Colonizers destroyed land, animals, and ecosystems; They dispossessed people, dismantled communities, dismembered collective bodies, and demolished political and religious structures in the most devastating and debilitating ways. The ravaging of the continent’s land and natural resources as well as of the destroying of the indigenous peoples’ cultures and identities have had deleterious impacts on the soil and the people of the soil, especially Africana girls and women, whom I identify as sisters of the soil,

The continent is considered rich in natural resources with the potential for economic vitality⁷ however, many people in African countries have been impoverished economically because those resources are exploited by and outsourced to corporations and countries that fuse political and economic power to control the economy and disenfranchise natal communities. In addition, many African girls and women are being forced into sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and domestic servitude in increasing and at alarming rates.⁸ Many are trafficked both nationally and internationally, similar to the ways that Hagar and the virgin girls in the book of Esther are exploited. Historically, Africa has been central to trade and trafficking routes because colonizers and traffickers thrive on preying on vulnerable individuals, communities, nations and continents. For example, the transatlantic slave trade commencing in the 16th century is one of the most horrific, traumatic acts of injustice perpetuated against humanity. Also referred to as the Maafa,⁹ the transatlantic slave trade was a commercial and economic enterprise that lasted approximately

⁷ For example, see Joshua Dwayne Settles, “The Impact of Colonialism on African Economic Development” Honors Thesis, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, 1996; Ivan Turok, and Gordon McGranahan, “Urbanization and Economic Growth: The Arguments and Evidence for Africa and Asia,” *Environment and Urbanization* 25, no. 2 (2013): 465-482; Gareth Austin, “The Economics of Colonialism in Africa,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economic: Volume 1: Context and Concepts*: Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁸ See, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Report on Trafficking in Persons Report (2009) accessed at https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf

⁹ The transatlantic slave trade is also referred to as the Maafa, a term coined by Marimba Ani to represent the history, genocide, and enduring effects of slavery and anti-Black racism and discrimination in the African Diaspora. The term is an appropriation of the Swahili word meaning “disaster or catastrophe.” It has resonance with the term Shoah, often used to denote the Jewish Holocaust. See Dona Marimba Richards, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora*. Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1994

four centuries, victimizing African women, men, children, and natural resources. The conditions were brutal. The dehumanization of African women in particular and exploitation of the land is horrifyingly cruel.

Rampant sexual violence and abject poverty are intersectional tools that are used to perpetuate assaults against Africa and her daughters. In fact, the exploitation of African resources and sexual violence against Africana girls and women are intentional strategies, rooted in Christian missions, to divest the land and people of livelihood, stability, and cultural identity. Both the geographical body of Africa and anatomical, material bodies of Africana females have become part of the terrain of conflict as both strategies of and casualties of conflicts. This is evidenced in the biblical narratives: Abraham is in conflicts with the Egyptians and his wife, Sarai; the king and his officials in the book of Esther are at war with the female collective. As a result, rape and sex trafficking become systematic strategies to solve conflicts (between males and females and colonizers and colonized) and are by-products of conflicts between the same in the story worlds. Moreover, Africa's natural resources and girls and women are continuously pillaged as a result of ongoing conflicts, savage warfare, and colonial domination still today.

The exploitation of Africa's soil and resources causes grave environmental concerns. In addition, environmental degradation leads to health disparities for the people of the land. Both are violations of human and land rights. In fact, Africa's robust resources strategically positions her as site for military placement and involvement which breeds international conflicts and violence driven by greed. These conflicts and wars are causing the ecological and biological annihilation of Africana people and wildlife.¹⁰ Likewise, the sexual exploitation of Africana girls and women have multiple physical, emotional, psychological, economic, and spiritual consequences. Sexual abuse not only impact our material bodies and individual memories but have lasting effects on the collective memories and identity of Africana people as a cultural group. In addition, the growing field of epigenetics has proven that experiences of trauma such as sexual exploitation, are absorbed by DNA. There are, in fact, genetic ramifications for intergenerational transmissions of trauma. Negative health consequences are transmitted generationally through the body's biological memory of harmful experiences influenced by physical and social environments. In other words, racially discriminatory and sexually violent practices and the embodiment of inequality are transmitted through epigenetic influences.¹¹ The chronic pain and acute distress that result from these experiences alter mothers and their offspring's genetic expression which often results in overactive physiological responses including deterioration and increased vulnerability to disease. To prevent and curtail further damage to Africana females' bodies, psyches, and souls, not only is polyvocal intersectional

¹⁰ For example, see Frances Stewart, Douglas Holdstock, and Antonio Jarquin, "Root Causes of Violent Conflict in Developing Countries Commentary: Conflict—from Causes to Prevention?" *BJM* 324, no. 7333 (2002): 342-345; Paul, Collier and Ian Bannon, *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003.

¹¹ Bridget Goosby and Chelsea Heidbrink, "Transgenerational Consequences of Racial Discrimination for African American Health" in *Social Compass*, 7, no. 8 (August 2013): 630-643.

analysis necessary but, more robust interdisciplinary assessments of the comprehensive impact of sexual exploitation and trafficking against Africana females is crucial.

Both Mother Africa and sisters of the soil experience what Ron Ayerman (2002) has termed “cultural trauma.” Cultural trauma is a type of collective trauma that occurs when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 2013, 6). Cultural trauma is characterized not only by collective and intergenerational sexual exploitation but also by a loss of personhood and cultural identity, experienced by many Africana subjects (Patterson 1982). Our histories are marked by numerous interconnecting traumas including displacement, colonization, and sexual traumatization which leads to cultural fragmentation of identity.

When girls and women are raped, we are oppressed. Our anatomical bodies are gazed upon and violated; our socio-cultural bodies are regulated, silenced, and erased; and often our anatomical bodies are displaced from native geographical bodies for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Both the geographical, continental body of Africa and anatomical Africana bodies are treated like capital for consumption by and the sexual gratification of patriarchs and empires. Colonizers and attackers use rape to socially control, dominate, and destroy Africana females. The sexual exploitation functions to weaken Africana females’ honor, integrity and strength. Thus, the crimes of rape and sexual trafficking are not only viewed as crimes against single individuals but are crimes against Africana females collectively and against the continent of Africa, itself.

Conclusion

I have illustrated that Africana females and Mother Africa are perceived as exploitable bodies of natural and sexual resources for the consumption of patriarchs and imperial subjects. Hagar is sexually trafficked by Abram, the virgin girls in the book of Esther by King Ahasuerus and Mother Africa continue to be exploited for their natural resources. Trade and trafficking routes are established and utilized to displace and colonize African girls after being traded and captured. These girls are transported to locales where they are then sexually exploited and subjected to colonial domination and patriarchy. My aim has been to transform the silence around the sexual abuse and exploitation of Africa and her daughters. If we are to develop an polyvocal intersectional Africana biblical hermeneutic, centering gender and the earth, we must start by interrogating our sacred texts to highlight how the intersection of religion, sexism, racism, and classism is not a new phenomenon. Intersectional oppression manifested in ancient contexts as recorded in sacred texts and continues to manifest in our contemporary social, economic, political and religious contexts. Specifically, we must investigate and interrogate ideologies and sexually violent acts that negatively impact Mother Africa and her daughters whom I refer to as sisters of the soil. These exploitative acts not only impact anatomical bodies and psyches but, there are detrimental ecological and environmental effects on the geographical body of Africa as well. Although we are surviving and resisting sexual violence, the violence of narrative erasure, and other environmental violence, we must challenge institutions and ideologies that uphold and justify violent acts against us, especially sexually violence acts.

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